

TOPIC 22

VARIABLES TO CONSIDER IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS. STUDENT GROUPINGS, SPACE AND TIME MANAGEMENT, SELECTION OF THE METHODOLOGY, ROLES OF THE TEACHER.

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0. INTRODUCTION

1. PUPIL GROUPINGS

The first variable is grouping students, so what are the possibilities?

In relation to the size of the group, there can be different options that are going to be explained. It is important to consider aspects such as pupils' abilities, learning styles and also the type of learners our students are. Considering the last point, they can be divided into four groups: concrete learners, analytic learners, communicative learners and authority-oriented learners.

1.1. LOCKSTEP

A lockstep or whole class grouping is very common in a traditional classroom but also in the focused-practice stage. Here, all the students are doing the same activity at the same time.

Some advantages of lockstep are:

- Students get a good language model, the teacher.
- Reinforces sense of belonging, so they are involved all together in the same task.
- This is not very stressful, so they feel more comfortable and free.

But many disadvantages can be:

- Students get little chance to practice or talk, even some students may not participate.
- All the group works on the same and at the same time, it doesn't take into consideration individualities.
- It does not favour communicative activities.

1.2. GROUP/TEAM WORK

This kind of grouping has an enormous potential, but when creating the groups, it is important to follow criteria. These criteria should be pedagogical, linguistic or related

to the attention to diversity. Authors such as Kagan and Johnson and Johnson made their theories about cooperative learning, in which the basis is to promoting the acquisition of new contents but in a cooperative way and also to attend to diversity.

Working in groups, as Donn Byrne states, has a lot of advantages:

- It increases the amount of speaking time and opportunities to use the language.
- It encourages the use of the 4 linguistic skills in an integrated way.
- It improves the relationships.

Moreover, Douglas Brown explained some drawbacks which are:

- It needs preparation when creating the groups, mixing weak and strong pupils.
- Pupils can use their mother tongue.
- Group work can make noise, but they have to control the level of noise they make.

Teams are a little bit different from groups. On the one hand, teams are formed by half of the class, they are less used but suitable for competitive activities. On the other hand, we can distinguish three main types of cooperative groups:

- Informal learning groups: short term and not very structured. Not more than three people dealing with quick activities.
- Formal learning groups: are assigned a task or project and they work together until it is complete. These groups can be homogeneous or heterogeneous depending on the task. More than five students can become unproductive.
- Cooperative base groups: different from the previous in that they are long term groups. These usually become not just academic but a personal support system for each other, building relationships. All the members of the group work together in order to achieve a common goal. It has been proved that this kind of learning has strong effectiveness in the learning process.

There are five fundamental elements involved in cooperative learning which distinguish it from other forms of group learning:

- Positive interdependence: all the members have a common goal and know that all of them are linked with each other in a way that one cannot succeed without others.
- Individual and group responsibility: the group has a responsibility and each member has to contribute toward the common goal. The performance of each individual must be assessed.
- Interpersonal and small group skills: necessary to work together. Some strategies like good communication, problem solving, trust building, or appreciate the group members should be taught and worked in class.
- Promote interaction: students support and encourage each other by sharing resources, as well as academic and personal support as part of the main goal.
- Group processing: group members need to feel free to communicate openly with each other to express concerns as well as to celebrate accomplishments. They should discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintain effective working relationships.

1.3. PAIR WORK

Pair work aims at communicative efficiency.

It has some advantages, as:

- Increasing the amount of pupil participation and language use.
- They feel motivated and relaxed, fostering their autonomous learning.
- It encourages cooperative learning.

Moreover, some disadvantages can be:

- Noise level is not so controllable.
- Children could use their mother tongue.

There are different types, such as open pairs (two pupils perform a task and the rest listen to them), closed pairs (when the whole class is working in pairs at the same time), open and closed pairs (these closed pairs form new ones during the activity)

and co-operative pairs (two pupils must help each other to complete an activity or task).

1.4. INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Individual work is also necessary in the learning process, so students can work at their own pace, using their cognitive style.

Following this, Howard Gardner, on his theory of multiple intelligences, describes that each person has one or several dominant intelligences in which he or she especially excels, and some weaker intelligences, standing at the midpoint in the other types of intelligence. The previously mentioned intelligences are: logical-mathematical, linguistic-verbal, spatial-visual, kinaesthetic-bodily, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic.

Some advantages of this grouping are:

- It attends the individual needs.
- Pupils can work at their own rhythm.

But the main drawback is that it doesn't encourage cooperation and sense of belonging to a group.

After explaining the different groupings, the next question arises, how can students be distributed in class? This will be answered in the next part of the topic.

2. SPACE AND TIME MANAGEMENT

2.1. CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION

The distribution of time and space can have an important impact on students' attitudes. So, how to sit students? First, it is important to consider their particular interests and needs. Fred Jones also states that teachers must have enough space to move in class. So, with these 2 conditions, some possibilities can be mentioned:

- Traditional sitting: where students face the teacher and the blackboard. It implies that the teacher is the controller of the activity, students cannot see each other so it doesn't favor interaction. It may be useful for presentations.
- Circular or semi-circular: teacher can be outside and not interfering letting students interact freely or sit between two students becoming a member of the group. It allows eye-contact and favors communication. It is useful for debates or games that require active participation of individual children. It also favors good feedback.
- Horseshoe or "u" shape: students sit forming a "U" and the teacher is outside. It is a good layout for presentation activities as all students can see each other and the teacher and it also favors interaction.
- Rows: other option is placing students in rows of two or three desks. This is very useful for explanation and pair-work. One large table is also used with the students seated around, but it is not appropriate for teamwork.
- Learning stations: pupils are distributed in groupings so each group of desks is focused on a specific activity.

All these varieties of sitting include desks, but are there other ways of sitting? In this part flexible sitting must be considered, which involves the use of unusual furniture to be part of the class such as blankets or even fit-balls. Having different possibilities allows students to sit according to their preferences and it also reduces the duration of sedentary periods, making reference to the active breaks. So, motivation, a relaxed atmosphere and continuous movement are the bases of it.

However, sitting is not the only element related to space management, what other elements must be considered? Decoration is an important factor related to the foreign language classroom. A notice board should be interesting with information related to English culture or even a classroom display where students can display their works and feel proud of them. Other places such as the listening corner or the classroom library can help develop receptive skills and also listening and reading habits which is

related to the Reading Plan explained in the current Organic Law of Education, the LOMLOE. It is remarkable that when setting the different decorative elements, they must be at pupils' eye level in order to feel them motivating and attractive.

After explaining the space organization, the next question appears, what about time management?

2.2. TIME MANAGEMENT

Timing is flexible and it makes reference to the organization of the time dedicated to each didactic unit and their lessons. Time management is related to the way in which time is used, so these are the techniques and activities planned in every lesson.

But, when organizing the time, what aspects must be considered?

- The type of timetable, which can be flexible in order to make the necessary adaptations, open allowing students to plan activities or traditional, focused on a fixed number of 50 minutes lessons.
- Realistic timing, doing the activities without rushing.
- Classes stages related to the time organization. A preparation stage to calm and motivate students, the presentation stage to identify aspects about language, practice stage to use language in a guided way and production stage, focused on free production.
- The end of the class should be dedicated to finishing the lesson with a good feeling. Jean Brewster states some aspects related to this, such as not finishing in the middle of an activity, it is better to finish early than late and encouraging students making them conscious about their own learning.

Now, the next doubt appears, how do teachers organize the teaching-practice?

3. SELECTION OF THE METHODOLOGIES

According to the Order 8th September, 2021 which develops the Decree 229/2011 which regulates the attention to diversity of students of the Autonomous Community of

Galicia, teachers must consider their students interests and needs in order to ensure their integral development.

The correct selection of the methodology is crucial to attend to the diversity, topics 13 and 14 explain the different ones in detail.

The methodology should be inclusive, active and communicative. *Harmer* defined the last activities as those that create a desire to communicate, have a communicative purpose, are focused on content more than form, require a variety of language and have less teacher interventions or material control.

To develop communicative competence, it is necessary to deal with the 4 skills of language in an integrated way but also considering the natural way of learning. This is oral skills before written and receptive before productive, being listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, we have to consider the intercultural awareness, explained by Claire Kramsch.

Moreover, the methodology will follow the basic principles establishes by the curriculum: individualization, socialization, motivation and promotion of learner's autonomy.

Using one methodology is not adequate to attend to the different characteristics of pupils, so using an eclectic methodology would be the better option. The main language learning theories on which a programming should be based are:

- Communicative approach: based on the belief that language learning takes place using real communicative situations.
- Learner-centered approach: the main character is the pupil, who take an active role in the teaching and learning process.
- Task and project-based learning: using the language to carry out meaningful tasks.
- The multiple intelligences theory, created by Howard Gardner and improved by neuroscience considering them abilities rather than intelligences.
- Other methodologies can be cooperative learning, gamification or the Total Physical Response, developed by James Asher, which considers learning through

movement.

From a methodological point of view, we can divide the class into three main stages following the PPP model, which is a traditional and most widely used model of teaching. In this model we can divide the lesson in three stages:

- Start with a warm-up to activate students' previous knowledge and interest towards the lesson.
- Presentation of new vocabulary or structures in an appropriate context.
- Practice stage, guided, meaningful and extensive, promoting communicative activities to consolidate meaning. We can use here any of the groups before explained to foster communication.
- Production stage, enables pupils to be autonomous producing their own compositions using new and previous learnt language.

An alternative to PPP model is the task-based approach in which students have a task and use the language as a tool to complete it. This task could be a game, problem solving or sharing information on which students are free to use the language they want. Our aim is to create a need to learn and use language. Task based approach follows the same structure; pre-task activity as an introduction of the topic, the task and final feedback.

As regards evaluation, every unit of our programming should include evaluation criteria. They should be observable, measurable and assessable; they define what students must know, understand and do in each curricular area. We will take into account the Decree for Galicia 155/2022, 15th of September and the Order of the 26th of May 2023 which refers to evaluation at primary level. Both documents state that the evaluation should be continuous, formative and inclusive.

So, regarding assessment, questions related to why, what, how and when to assess can appear.

- Why to assess? In order to recognize the progress of the students in relation to the teaching practice.

- What to assess? The knowledge and skills they have acquired and their attitudes and social behaviour. As teachers, we should do a self-evaluation in relation to the syllabus and the teaching-learning process adequacy.
- How to assess? There are different instruments to consider when evaluating. Rubrics are tables where the learning standards and the different levels of acquisition are established. A personal evaluation sheet can help with daily observation individually. The teacher's diary can reflect the suitability of the activities, aspects to improve or not, the explanations and if they were clear or not and the time needed for practice. Tests are useful to know specific parts of a student's progression. The self-assessment lists allow students and teachers to evaluate themselves. Moreover, the Information and Communication Technologies should not be forgotten when evaluating. Teachers must take advantage of their motivational power and evaluate using Google Classroom or Kahoot for example.
- When to assess? In 3 different moments. An initial evaluation, to recognize the level of students and the special needs they could have. A continuous evaluation should be done in every lesson. And a final evaluation considering the previous one, in order to see the progress and the different changes needed.

This evaluation process must be guided by the role of the teacher but, which are they?

4. TEACHER'S AND PUPIL'S ROLES

First of all it is worth noting that pupils are the center of the teaching-learning process so their active participation is crucial. In relation to teachers, they can acquire different roles depending on the task:

- Controller: the teacher is always in charge of everything in the classroom, determines what pupils do, when they should speak and what language forms they should use. Everything is planned ahead. It works on presentations or practice stages to check if pupils understood the meaning and form of new language and the instructions of the activities.

- Assessor: the teachers distribute the time, allow students to be creative and encourage self-assessment to become more independent and responsible. Teachers must also evaluate pupils' work, correct mistakes or give them the necessary feedback. We must also assess our own work.
- Organiser: the teacher involves students in a language performance and then keeps the process flowing. Also solves problems pupils may encounter during the activities and organise feedback.
- Prompter: the teacher facilitates the process of learning to students allowing them to discover language through practise rather than tell them about it. We must also encourage students to participate and make suggestions about how to carry out an activity when there is a silence or pupils don't know what to do next.
- Participant: the teacher participates in activities such as simulations, giving the opportunity to pupils to practice English with someone who has a higher level.
- Resource: this is the least directive role of the teacher. We should be ready if our pupils need help, this help must be given when a previous effort has been made. Nevertheless, it's not practical to push this role to an extreme as some control of planning and managing the classroom is essential

However, the teacher should always guide the language learning process being an example of pronunciation, facilitating comprehension, motivating and improving the interaction with students. But this participation should guarantee correct control and discipline which is strongly related to the next part of the topic.

5. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: CONTROL AND POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

Discipline can be affected by the teacher, students and also by the institution.

The teacher is the adult figure in the class and has the significant power to influence our pupils' feelings and behaviors. So, it is important that we prepare classes in advance, ensuring that they are significant and productive. Some tips can be using a calm tone of voice, be fair and treat students with respect and responsibility.

As regards pupils they should show interest in achieving a positive work atmosphere, cooperate and help each other and respect peers and teachers.

A suitable strategy for maintaining control and discipline could be to apply the principles of Positive Discipline, developed by Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott. It helps to build pupils' sense of community, increasing their academic achievement and motivation. It is focused on the idea that there are not good or bad children, there are only good and bad behaviors. The first ones should be reinforced while the second ones should be controlled. Teachers have to adopt a kind, encouraging and firm manner to involve children on this strategy.

The institution plays an important role in discipline too, so the management team must have a responsible attitude towards discipline and pupil behavior so everyone can work in a quiet and pleasant atmosphere.

Nowadays in schools we have a Coexistence Plan whose main lines of action are an inclusive education, peaceful coexistence and participation of all the members of the school community, prevention of bullying or any other type of violence and promotion of socialization and friendship.

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